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Dear Mom and Dad,

Although you may never receive this letter, this is the first time talking about myself and my relationship with both of you. We've always avoided talking about ourselves because we felt vulnerable. However, I want to break this barrier to develop our bond. There's a lot I want to tell you and there's a lot I'm curious about.

I struggle with school. Surprise! Even though I "effortlessly" pass every class with an A and involve myself in numerous extracurriculars, I struggle every day with the burden of school. At night, I lay in bed for hours, trying to solve chemistry or math problems in my head before an exam. Every day, I take an afternoon nap because I'm exhausted from school, not from my sleep schedule. For my chemistry final, I received a 61%, but I was only saved by my teacher's curve. My extracurriculars preoccupy every free hour of my life, and I wish I had a day to rest. I'm surprised I don't get paid for the effort I put into my extracurriculars! While I did get accepted to Johns Hopkins University, the only reason was my persistent effort and dedication to my studies. It's a struggle every day.

I also feel like I don't have an identity. I've entangled myself in the college application process, and the "American" society to the point that I've lost the identity I had when I was little. I loved drawing and writing stories. I loved playing video games and reading my weekends away. I always imagined a career as a professional athlete as I watched the 2012 Olympics. I also loved singing Chinese songs out loud in our living room. I loved writing Chinese calligraphy as the bold strokes of the ink felt empowering. I loved eating Chinese food and meeting relatives at "yum-cha". But over time, I stopped doing what made me, me. I found that hobbies, like video games or writing stories, didn't matter in the college application process unless you made a non-profit organization or demonstrated significant leadership. Instead, I put all my focus on my academic interest in public health, biology, and medicine, which I luckily enjoy but I wish to pursue non-academic extracurriculars. I also found that acting Chinese was "uncool". I was bullied for speaking Chinese and for showing off my Chinese heritage in elementary school. Consequently, I didn't want to attend Chinese school, meet with the family at "yum-cha", or sing any Chinese songs. This is the reason I never spoke Chinese to both of you at school. If I didn't want to be ostracized by my peers, I needed to be "American", which meant forgetting my culture. Without my heritage and hobbies, I don't feel interesting or a person. I simply feel like a "thing" that only thinks about school, public health, and medicine. I don't have an identity.

Similar to both of you, I struggle with expressing my concerns and health issues. I'm always concerned about something, whether it's a small concern like deciding which hoodie to wear, or a big concern like deciding my future college. My health is also worse than you expect. Every day, I suffer from some type of pain, such as hip dysplasia pain or chronic ankle pain. I have headaches every day in the afternoon, affecting my ability to focus. On a scale of 1 to 10, my hip dysplasia pain can progress to a 6.5. You don't know because I don't like talking about

my health and pain. I simply don't want to burden you, but I now know expressing myself is important to communicate effectively.

I also have a question for you. Why did you never force me to pursue extracurriculars or classes like an Asian tiger mom? I've always read about tiger moms forcing their children into Kumon or enrolling their children in piano classes until graduation. However, you let me pursue any interest as long as I demonstrated a strong passion and a solid career plan. Hence, I thought about becoming a teacher, violinist, chef, zoologist, veterinarian, and now a doctor. I don't know why you're so lenient.

There is a desire and thought I want to express. I wish both of you cared more about my life. Of course, I don't want you to become helicopter parents, but I wish both of you took the time to learn about my interests or school. How was class? Did you know there's a medical opportunity? What ice cream flavor do you like? These are some questions I wish you asked to learn about me. That way, both of you won't be surprised when I explain that I'm lactose-intolerant for the 100th time or I want to study until 1 AM.

I also want to let you know that I appreciate all the work both of you put to support my dreams. From working on holidays to driving me around for my extracurricular activities, I'm grateful to have parents that sacrifice their lives for my dreams. Without your sacrifices, I would never excel in my academics and extracurriculars. I know I never express my gratitude because it's awkward and I take your sacrifices for granted. Thank you. I hope I can return the favor when I become a doctor by taking care of both of you and buying whatever both of you want.

Alternatively, I want to know more about both of you.

Mom, what was your dream job? From time to time, we end up talking about your past occupations. You were a kindergarten teacher and nurse in China. When you arrived in America, you were a waiter and now a custodian. If you never needed to jump from job to job, what would you be? I always wondered what you would pursue if we never had financial troubles. Also, do you want me to support your dreams when you're older? Of course, it's never too late to pursue something new, so I will always support your aspirations.

Dad, what were your dreams? How was the trip from China to America? Did you come to achieve the American dream? Or did you have other aspirations in China? Was it difficult traveling and adapting to America? You never talk about your needs, wants, or feelings. Honestly, I don't know anything about you. I wish I knew more about your educational journey and your family in China. Your life is mysterious.

To both of you, why did you fall in love with each other? I never learned about your love story. Was it like a scene out of a K-Drama or did the two of you gradually fall in love? I wonder this since both of you aren't close anymore. You tell my brother or me to call each other, instead of directly calling each other. You don't sleep in the same bed and never show affection. Sometimes, I hear you two fight about washing dishes and complain about each other's stupidity. But at the end of the day, both of you live in the same house and work together to provide for my brother and me. What brought and continues to bring you together?

Why did both of you decide to have me? Looking at my brother's ten-year age gap with me, there had to be a significant reason to conceive a second child after a decade. Mom, you said that my brother wished for a little sister on Christmas. Technically, it would make sense since I

am born in September, but a ten-year-old's wish can't be granted easily! Raising another child is time-consuming and expensive, so why did you take the risk?

I also wonder if the two of you are proud of me. Sadly, I don't speak fluent Cantonese, nor am I knowledgeable about our Chinese culture. According to Mom, I stress her out with my health issues. When I present my report cards, both of you don't react at the sight of a 4.0. When I announced my acceptance to Johns Hopkins University, both of you talked about the college's prestige, and not my success. While both of you don't seem disappointed, you also don't demonstrate your joy for me. What do you think about me?

Lastly, I wonder what both of you want in the next ten years. Do you want to buy your first house? Do you want my brother to get married? Do you want me to become a doctor? Now, I want to fulfill your wants, rather than you sacrificing your time and money for my brother and me. I also want to cherish and enjoy the time we have, achieving goals and exploring the world together. I hope we can be more open with each other as the years pass.

Sincerely,

Your MeiMei, Connie Wu Huang